

>>> IMMUNE PLATOON DISEASE DATABASE <<<

CASE FILE: THE SCARLET SCOURGE • REAL NAME: RUBELLA (FROM LATIN, MEANING "LITTLE RED")
KNOWN ALIASES: GERMAN MEASLES • MICROBE TYPE: VIRUS



PROFILE

Even trying its hardest, rubella often only makes people mildly sick—fever, swollen glands behind the ears (lymph nodes), and a rash that starts on the face and spreads down. Many people have no symptoms at all. So why is rubella a big deal? Turns out that this pipsqueak has a much more sinister goal than just making big people a little bit sick...it's after babies.

When rubella infects a pregnant woman, it can often cause her baby to suffer extreme and permanent problems like deafness, heart defects, blindness, and mental retardation. The medical name for rubella's dirty work is "Congenital Rubella Syndrome," or CRS for short. Sometimes the babies that rubella attacks die before they are born.

POWERS & ABILITIES

Rubella is highly contagious (even several days before people know it has gotten a hold of them). Before a rubella vaccine was invented, it pulled off a massive outbreak in the U.S., infecting 12 million people in 1964 and '65. Many of the people infected were pregnant women. In the end, about 20,000 babies were born with permanent disabilities or health problems. And, many died.

PREFERRED METHOD OF ATTACK

Rubella is an "air and surface" attacker. It rides through the air on droplets from a cough or sneeze, waiting for someone else to breathe it in so it can start a new infection.

KNOWN WEAKNESSES

A vaccine can conquer rubella. About 95% of people vaccinated against rubella are protected by their vaccine.

The most common rubella vaccine is called "the MMR vaccine," because it combines vaccines for measles, mumps, and rubella. There is also a vaccine for just measles and rubella, one for just mumps and rubella, and a plain rubella vaccine. In these vaccines rubella virus is so weak and unable to grow that the body can easily kill it. In doing this, the immune system learns how to beat this attacker and protect you against the real thing should it ever need to.

Rubella typically only gets one shot at the people it successfully infects. Once an unvaccinated person has been infected and recovered, that person's immune system can protect him or her for life.

PREFERRED VICTIMS

Anyone can get rubella. When healthy children or adults get infected, their symptoms are uncomfortable yet usually mild. This gutless attacker is most dangerous to the smallest babies, ones who haven't even been born yet.

PRECAUTIONS FOR THE PUBLIC

First line of defense, vaccines. Then, it's just "back to basics." Wash hands often with soap to get rid of any virus you may have touched. And, cover up coughs and sneezes to avoid spreading your own germs to others.

AREA OF OPERATIONS

Like most viruses, rubella is a world-wide operator. This disease currently has less success in areas where more people are immunized against it.

CRIMINAL RECORD

The battle has been a long one. Rubella was discovered in the 18th century. In 1814, German scientists figured out that this infector was its own bad guy, and not just a form of measles or scarlet fever.

This is how Rubella also became known as the German Measles. It took until 1941 for scientists to find the sad truth that when rubella infects a pregnant woman, her baby can have terrible health problems as a result.